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Truth Contests and Talking Corpses

This essay is an attempt to learn about truth from fiction. It takes as its point of departure a cluster of motifs that appears, with intriguing permutations, in diverse second century stories.[1] In each case, the general narrative pattern is as follows: two parties with competing claims to truth hold a formal contest in a public place where, after a series of abrupt reversals, the issue is finally decided by the evidence of a dead, mutilated, or resurrected body. The appearance of this cluster is not something to be explained away in purely literary terms. If Mary Douglas' claim has merit, and "the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived,"[2] we can ask these corpses to tell us about the ways Roman society constructed truth. Furthermore, can we learn from the abrupt reversals in these narratives anything about the way Romans experienced shifts in truth-paradigms in "real life"? (This is, of course, a question of paramount importance for appreciating the religious change propelled by Christianity).

The tales about truth-contests with which we begin come from Apuleius' *Golden Ass* and the *Acts of Peter*, a second-century work of hagiography in the New Testament Apocrypha. From these frank fictions we turn to a later sub-literary text that purports to be the stylized script of two typical criminal trials in the "real world." This document provides material for speculation on the functional meaning of truth in a society that practiced judicial torture. Do the dizzying shifts of truth-paradigms experienced by the reader of fictional truth-contests provide some sort of commentary on the experience of the those who watched the enforcement dramas of the Roman criminal justice system in real life? Then we interrogate a conservative educator to find out how *paideia,* the traditional training of the educated elite, might be implicated in these constructions of truth by torture. The letters of Synesius of Cyrene, a well-groomed product of the *paideia* system who became a bishop, provides us with some *aperçus* about the relationship of truth to power, and we end with some thoughts about continuity and change in the social construction of truth between the "pagan" second-century and the "Christian" fourth.

The subject under discussion is narrative patterns that are (I will claim) as much socio-cultural as literary. We will take hold of the literary end of the stick first, however, and begin with some story-telling.

The Tale of the Lovesick Stepmother

The world of the *Golden Ass* is the imaginative analogue of a pinball machine. The institutions of society are the fixed plastic pathways, while paranormal transformations and

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[1] An earlier version of this paper was delivered in 1994 at the Tenth Quinquennial Congress of the Féderation internationale des associations d'études classiques (FIEC) in Québec.
I would like to thank the participants at that congress, as well as Peter Brown, Joan Burton, Robert Kaster, Jim Porter, and Susan Stephens for their suggestions and criticism.

[2] *Natural Symbols* (New York, 1970) 65.

arbitrary acts of political authority are the trapdoors, swinging levers, and springs that propel the spinning protagonist all over the map. This fantastic laboratory destabilizes distinctions between appearance and reality: in a world where magical transformations are possible at any moment, which is which? As part of its play with ontological themes, the *Ass* destabilizes the connection between the body and truth.

People in the ancient world felt there was such a connection, but, as the practice of physiognomy shows, they remained uncertain about how the truth-signs of the body should be read. In the tenth book of the novel we find a latter-day Phaedra who has taken to her bed. Though lusting for her step-son, she feigns illness, "misrepresenting the wound of her mind with the condition of her body."[3] It was a cliché in antiquity that the physical symptoms of love closely mimic the signs of illness, [4] but here the body gives off clues that mislead. Truth, anchored in the body, produces signs whose referent, pending a whole series of reversals and revelations, remains precariously unfixed. The wicked stepmother's avowals produce rejection; her passion swerves to hatred. She sends her slave out to procure poison. Unexpectedly, however, her own child consumes the noxious draught intended for his half-brother. Undeterred by this surprising reversal of her plans, the step-mother reverses the truth to fit the situation. She tells her husband that her step-son poisoned the child after trying unsuccessfully to seduce her, clinching her argument with her own son's corpse. The bereaved father, completely taken in by this fabrication, rushes from the graveside to the forum, where, in a public spectacle of grief, he begs the senators for the destruction of his remaining son.

The body language of the afflicted father seems utterly genuine, yet the truth that it expresses is utterly false. His fellow-citizens find his performance so affecting, however, as to be completely convinced of the justice of his claim. They demand that all formal inquiries into its truth be dispensed with in favor of stoning the accused on the spot. (Had they succeeded in doing so, they would have created for themselves the corpse which seems to be needed to clinch the truth in these narratives where truth is hotly contested and subject to startling reversals).[5] The magistrates, however, fearing a riot, propose a formal trial to examine the accusations on both sides. But, despite strict adherence to traditional procedures, this rhetorical competition (*dicentium contentio*) brings us no closer to the truth. Indeed the only result of is to make the senatorial jury issue a formal announcement that the truth of this accusation is not to be decided by conjecture and suspicion, but by "sure and certain proof" (*probationibus certis*). What "sure and certain proof" amounts to in this situation is the evidence of the slave. A hardened rogue, he is undeterred by the gravity of the proceedings and confidently affirms his own fictions as if they were truth (*quae ipse finxerat, quasi vera adseverare atque adserere incipit*).

The jury is completely taken in by his false body language (*simulata ...trepidatione*) and by his allegations "that bore an extreme—an excessive—semblance to the truth" (*eximie ac nimis ad veritatis imaginem*). They are all ready to condemn the innocent youth when a respected senator intervenes. He is the physician from whom the slave bought the poison, giving in payment a bag of gold pieces sealed with his own seal. This revelation produces a dramatic reversal in the body language of the slave, who collapses from ruddy over-confidence to deathlike pallor, and is reduced, temporarily speechless, to babbling.[6] Again the jury is unable to resist this congruence of speech and body language. Everyone now thinks the slave is guilty.

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[3] *vulnus animi mentitur in corporis valetudine* (*Golden Ass* 10. 2. 19.)

[4] For a non-fictional example, see Galen *On Prognosis* 6.

[5] What Phaedra does, in Euripides' version of the myth, is create her own "corpse of authentication."

[6] This theme of aphasia in the face of truth we will see again in the story of Peter and Simon Magus.

But he soon pulls himself together and begins to call the doctor a liar. The slave's signet ring is forcibly compared with the seal on the bag. Surprisingly, even written evidence (a signet ring is an explicit signifier *par excellence*, what Americans would call a "smoking gun") is not able to decide the contest in the face of the slave's intransigent body: attempts to extract the truth from him by torture fail, and the stand-off continues.

Only now does the doctor play his ace: he claims that he had not actually sold the slave poison, but a sleeping potion. So truth really is to be recovered from a body—the resurrected body of the dead boy. [7] All and sundry hasten to the tomb. As the father lifts the coffin lid, the last vestiges of mandragora dissipate from the boy's system. Still swathed in his grave-clothes, the boy is brought into the courtroom. There the villainy of the slave and stepmother is exposed at last: "The naked truth came forth into public view."[8] *Nuda veritas*, truth figured as a body, sends the stepmother into exile, the slave to the cross, while the doctor is awarded the purse of gold.

The Contest of Peter and Simon

In the second-century *Acts of Peter*[9] we find the Christian community at Rome in disarray. While Paul is out of town on a missionary journey, a rival has appeared: Simon Magus. He flies in on a cloud of fiery dust, starts working the territory, and soon there are only seven Christians left in Rome (four of them shut-ins). Everyone else has decided that Paul was only a sorcerer. Fortunately the Lord notifies Peter of this emergency; help is on the way.

When Peter arrives in Rome, he is told that Simon is lodging at the house of a senator who used to patronize the Christian poor but has changed his mind about them and now regrets everything he ever spent on "those impostors." Peter's scanty band of followers urges him to "join battle with Simon," so he marches straight to the wealthy senator's house. When refused admission by the doorkeeper, Peter boldly unchains the senator's watchdog. The huge beast instantly acquires a human voice and acknowledges Peter's supernatural authority, "What do you bid me do, you servant of the ineffable living God?"[10] The speaking dog is sent inside to summon Simon, who becomes speechless. In this narrative sudden bouts of aphasia and sudden bursts of miraculous speech are related ways of figuring the intrusion of supernatural force into the body. [11] The effect of these wonders on the wealthy senator is a reconversion, a complete reversal of his ideas of truth. Simon's spell over him is broken and he runs outside begging Peter to readmit him to the Christian fold.

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[7] *Nemo de curia, de optimatibus nemo ac ne de ipso quidem populo quisquam, qui non illuc curiose confluxerit.* ("There was no senator, no well-born citizen, even no member of the populace who did not converge on that spot with curiosity" 10. 12) This theme of having all ranks of society assembled to witness a truth-contest is also prominent in the story of Peter and Simon.

[8] 10. 12.

[9] These survive in a close Latin translation of the original Greek. For a discussion of date and text see Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed. *The New Testament Apocrypha* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964) vol. 2, 259-275. This volume also contains an English translation of Lipsius' Latin text to which my translations are sometimes indebted.

[10] *Acts of Peter* 9 p. 57 Lipsius.

[11] In *Acts of Peter* 2, Peter refuses communion to woman guilty of a secret sin and prophesies that Satan will "throw her down before the eyes of all believers." The woman instantly falls to the ground, hemiplegic and aphasic. Her paralyzed body furnishes instant confirmation of Peter's claim in this abbreviated truth-contest. The young man resurrected by Peter in the forum calls himself, in a telling variation of Paul's words in *Romans* 12. 1, a "speaking sacrifice" *(loquentem victimam) (Acts of Peter* 29 p. 79).

During Peter's public reconciliation with the repentant senator, another incident demonstrates Peter's access to authentic supernatural power through further permutations of the tropes of aphasia/miraculous speech and miraculous death-and-resurrection. Amidst the crow of admiring bystanders Peter's discernment detects one smirk: a young man who is secretly possessed by a demon. Under pressure from Peter, the demon reports the goings-on inside the mansion, how Simon (who seems to have recovered his voice) keeps telling the dog, "Say that I am not here," while the dog insists that he will finish Peter's work and die at Peter's feet. After this report, Peter exorcises the demon, which leaves the young man's body, but defiantly kicks to pieces a great marble statue of the emperor standing in the senator's courtyard. The senator is terrified; he fears punishment for treason. Peter instructs him to take a handful of water, pray to Lord Jesus Christ, and sprinkle it over the broken pieces. The statue is restored--a resurrection of sorts. The senator's physical integrity is also preserved by this miracle: he is saved from torture on a charge of *maiestas (si ergo, domine, voluntas tua est, esse me in corpore, et non patiar aliquid a Caesar, sit lapis hic integer sicut ante fuit)* by a proleptic miracle that reestablishes the broken statue's bodily integrity *(statua integra...lapis integer...statua integra)*.[12]

Meanwhile, the dog has finished arguing with Simon and runs outdoors. He predicts that Peter will defeat Simon in a great contest. Saluting Peter as "Messenger and Apostle of the true God,"[13] he falls dead at his feet. Many people in the crowd are impressed by this form of "authentication by a corpse," but others recall the wonders worked by Simon and demand from Peter another sign.

Similar incidents keep keep destabilizing our grasp of "reality" in the *Golden Ass.* How are we to know which manifestations of the paranormal express authentic truth? In the *Acts of Peter* the contest between Peter and Simon and has two avenues of resolution: either one out-does the other in a display of raw power as the audience judges the quantity and quality of miracles performed, or one competitor is able to demonstrate that his power comes from a more authentic source. The dog's salutation of Peter, for example, is evidence of the latter type.
But audiences love contests of the former type, and the *Acts of Peter* does not leave them disappointed. Peter seizes a smoked fish hanging in a shop window and throws it into the pond. "In thy name, Jesus Christ, in which they still fail to believe" (he says to the kipper), "in the presence of all these unbelievers, come alive and swim!" That this is not a grade B delusion but a grade A marvel the people can see from the fact that the fish keeps on swimming and even eats the bread crusts that people throw in for it. Evidence of truth from a rehydrated body this time, and many more people believe.

Freed from spiritual dependence on Simon, Marcellus lays hands on his evil house-guest, disrespectfully touching his body in a gesture that signals his status-reversal to the household slaves, who amplify the message with blows and buckets of offal.[14] Here Simon's preliminary defeat on the supernatural plane (his dealings with Peter's proxy, the talking dog) is reflected in a temporary loss of physical integrity.[15] Expelled from Marcellus' house in a full-scale *charivari*, Simon arrives at Peter's doorstep to challenge him to a debate. Peter does not deign to meet him face to face, but sends another proxy to answer the door, a woman with an infant in arms. Again,

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[12] *Acts of Peter* 11 p. 59.
[13] *Acts of Peter 12 p. 60,* following Turner's reading *angele et apostole dei veri.*
[14] Credit is due to Donald Lateiner for expanding my awareness of the social significance of gesture in ancient literature *(The Sardonic Smile* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995]).
[15] Compare *Acts of Peter* 28 p. 76 where Simon's immanent defeat in the contest of the corpses is signaled by the Prefect's impatiently pushing him away from the bier with his own hands.

miraculous speech: the babe upbraids Simon with the voice of a mature man. He predicts a definitive contest in the forum the following Sabbath, and in the name of Jesus strikes Simon dumb: miraculous aphasia.[16]

The great contest in the forum is staged as a cross between a judicial procedure and a pay-per-view entertainment.[17] Bleachers [or a platform] have been set up in the forum[18] and crowds of people have paid a gold piece each to attend the contest. The higher orders of society are all present: senators, prefects, and officers. Peter arrives and takes his stand in the center of the scene. The audience screams for a public display of truth. "Show us, Peter, who is your god, or what may be his dignity and rank that gives you such assurance...We have Simon's evidence, let us have yours. Demonstrate to us--both of you--whom we should truly believe."[19]

If this language brings to mind a competitive science demonstration it is no wonder, since second century Rome was a city where truth-claims of all kinds were adjudicated by contest. Galen, like Peter, was once the new man in town who had to establish his authority by competitive prophecy and wonder-working against rival claimants both hostile and unscrupulous. If he was successful his friends would call him a prophet and his enemies a magician.[20] In an episode reminiscent of Peter's trials with Simon, Galen triumphed over skeptical rivals in a public contest (ἀγών) by producing aphasia in an experimental animal.[21] In this scientific truth contest a mutilated body provides the clinching argument: the suddenly mute beast "speaks" Galen's truth.

In the *Acts of Peter,* the truth-contest between the real prophet and the unscrupulous magician again hinges on the control of bodies--three of them. The narrative is structured in such a way that Peter and Simon test their powers on an ascending tricolon of corpses: first a slave, then the son of a poor Christian widow, and lastly the senatorial son of a wealthy aristocrat. As in the trial scene of Apuleius' "Tale of the Wicked Stepmother," preliminary sparring with words proves inconclusive. Peter then proposes that Simon work one of his wonders and promises that he himself will then undo it. The prefect pushes forward one of his slaves towards Simon, "Take this one and put him to death. And you," turning towards Peter, "restore him to life."[22] The slave's body, which could be racked for evidence as standard procedure in criminal trials, is here casually submitted to Simon's lethal ministrations in religious truth-contest.

Simon has but to whisper in the slave's ear: he becomes aphasic and dies. But before Peter can restore him to life, the narrative prolongs suspense with an intensifying duplication. A second corpse-test presents itself when an impoverished Christian widow begs Peter to turn his attention to *her* dead son. Peter sends some young men to fetch him. The check his nostrils and confirm that he really is dead (the "before photograph"). Meanwhile, the prefect is manifesting some impatience about his dead slave. Peter obligingly invokes his god, "And now, in the sight of all, raise up by your power and through my voice the man whom Simon killed with his touch!"[23] He instructs the prefect to take the corpse by the hand, and lo! it walks. The response of

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[16] *ommutesce coactus nomine meo (Acts of Peter* 15 p. 62).
[17] *viri Romani, vos nobis veri iudices estote* (23 p. 71) ; *viri Romani...qui convenistis ad spectaculum* (29 p. 77).
[18] *in foro anabatras configi* (22 p. 69).
[19] *Acts of Peter* 23 pp. 70-1.
[20] *On Prognosis (Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* 5. 8. 1). The successful physician called a μάντις (7. 6-13 passim) or accused of γοητεία (1. 9).
[21] *On Prognosis* 5, Galen's demonstration of the recurrent laryngeal nerve.
[22] *Acts of Peter* 25 p. 72.
[23] *Acts of Peter* 26 p. 73, implying that Simon's power depends on physical proximity while Peter's god can effect miracles through Peter's voice alone.

the crowd shows that this reanimated corpse now has a public meaning as a sign of Peter's truth triumphant, "There is but one God, the one God of Peter!" they shout.[24] This is in fact very like the response of Marcus Aurelius to a medical truth-contest played out at his bedside. Commending Galen's diagnosis over the bumbling efforts of his regular physicians, he exclaimed to his valet, "We have *one doctor*, and he is a complete gentleman."[25]

Peter's triumph continues as the Christian widow's son is brought into the forum on a stretcher. Peter miraculously takes on the voice of Christ, "Young man, arise and walk."[26] No sooner has the crowd acclaimed this resurrection than a senatorial lady presses her way through the crowd. It just so happens that *her* son also has just died, the third in our series of corpses. Peter instructs her to bring the dead man to the forum. So soon a full-scale aristocratic funeral procession arrives to swell the crowd: slaves with caps of freedom on their heads, mourners, burial supplies, and a crowd of senators and their ladies. Peter calls for silence and formally challenges Simon to a trial *(iudicium iustum)* to determine which of them believes in a living god and which one is a sorcerer. The crowd accepts its role as jury, egging Simon on to "show his stuff" in language that evokes the boxing ring.[27] Simon accepts and raises the stakes: "Men of Rome, if you see me restore the dead man to life, will you expel Peter from the city?" The crowd roars enthusiastically that if Peter loses they will burn him alive. Simon stoops over the dead man three times, and sure enough, the corpse opens its eyes and starts bowing its head towards Simon. The fickle crowd scurries off to look for kindling. Peter rebukes them at the top of his lungs, "You believe that a dead man has been revived when he has not stood up?...Let the dead man speak, let him unbind his shrouded his jaw with his own hands, let him call for his mother...Now if you wish to see that he is dead and you are bewitched, let this man step back from the bier..." The impatient prefect pushes Simon away with his own hands[28] and the corpse lies immobile as before. Simon cannot make the corpse talk, and he can make it move only through an inferior sort of magic trick that depends on physical proximity.

By now the exposure of Simon's resurrection trick as a fraud has effected a reversal, or literal conversion of the crowd. "Shifting from credulity to rage,"[29] they clamor for Simon to be burned instead of Peter.[30] At Peter's command the last corpse stands up and unties the grave-wrappings

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[24] This seems to be the standard cheer used by the audience at the decisive moment of religious truth-contests. Compare the story of Apollonios the martyr, who, in the process of being burnt at the stake, had the presence of mind to ask his god for deliverance. As a miraculous mist descended to extinguish the fire, the audience at the execution yelled, "There is one God, the God of the Christians!" (*Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* 19. 8). On these acclamations see now David S. Potter, "Performance, Power, and Justice in the High Empire" in W. Slater, ed. *Roman Theater. E. Togo Salmon Papers I* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996) 129-159, 132 n. 11.

[25] ἰατρὸν ἔχων ἕνα καὶ τοῦτον ἐλεύθερον πάνυ *(On Prognosis* 11. 8).

[26] *et vocem accipiens Christi domini mei, dico tibi: iuvenis, surge et ambula (Acts of Peter* 27 p. 74).

[27] *hortabantur Simonem dicentes: Nunc si quid in te est, ostende palam: aut traduc aut traduceris, quid stas? age, incipe! (Acts of Peter* 28 p. 75).

[28] This abrupt violation of the invisible "no-fly zone" that should surround the body of any person of privileged standing constitutes an insult on the social plane and signals Simon's immanent failure to establish dominance on the supernatural plane.

[29] *in furia conversus a magia Simonis (Acts of Peter* 28 p. 76).

[30] Compare the response of the crowd at the contest of Abba Copres and a Manichaean missionary. Having failed to best the Manichaean in public debate, Copres proposes a trail by ordeal to demonstrate who has the true faith. At his request, the assembled audience builds a bonfire, from which he, of course, emerges unscathed. The Manichaean, badly scorched, is run out of town by the crowd chanting, "Burn the deceiver alive!" (*Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* 10. 30-32) As Richard Lim remarks, "The ordeal can thus be read as the functional equivalent--a kind of *sermo humilis*--of the public debate." (*Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order in Late Antiquity* [Berkeley,

from his jaw, saying, "I beg you, sir, let us go to our Lord Jesus Christ whom I saw talking with you just now..." With this confirmation from beyond the grave, the truth test is definitively decided by a talking corpse. Not only has Peter out-trumped Simon in a competitive display of supernatural power, but his power has been shown to come from a more authentic source.[31]

A corpse (or three), a public forum, two claims to truth under adjudication, an audience that functions as jury, a jury that functions as audience, truth concealed by slick rhetoric but revealed by aphasia or miraculous speech, a grisly fate awaiting the loser, and a surprise witness from beyond the grave—these are some of the dramatic ingredients that these suspense narratives have in common. In Christian narratives, there is always a sense of _fait accompli since in a Christian universe there is only one truth that, whatever its vicissitudes, will always ultimately triumph. In Apuleian narrative, there are more possibilities for surprise.

The Tale of Thelyphron

Take, for example, the Tale of Thelyphron,[32] who once hired himself out as guard of a corpse to keep witches from gnawing its face by night. He accepts his commission from the dead man's widow, whose beauty appears undimmed by grief. In other words, her body does not quite match what we think we know of her emotional state. (In this respect her ambiguous body-language recalls the lovesick stepmother). If Thelyphron falls asleep on the job and fails to restore the corpse intact (*integrum corpus*), he will forfeit his fee and whatever bits of his own face may be needed to restore the corpse. So the widow calls in witnesses—not, as in the Acts of Peter, to attest the deadness of the corpse, but to attest the intactness of its face, a "before" photograph, if you like. Here ensues a locked room mystery [Winkler 1985]. Thelyphron falls so soundly asleep while guarding the corpse "that even Apollo would not easily be able to tell which of us lying there was the more dead." He awakens terrified, and rushes over to check its features. Fortunately, everything is still in place and he receives his reward of gold pieces in the morning.

Next the corpse is paraded through the forum in an aristocratic funeral procession. Suddenly an old man rushes to the bier and calls out for justice to his fellow-citizens. The deceased, he claims--his nephew--has been poisoned by his adulterous wife. The crowd is easily swayed by the "verisimilitude" of the accusation, and the spectator chorus almost becomes a lynch mob, as in the two previous stories we have discussed, but the deceased's uncle proposes, "Let us turn over the arbitration of truth to divine providence." By this he means the supernatural arbitration of an Egyptian priest, who has already agreed (for a fee) to reanimate the corpse. So instead of the familiar secular ritual of a criminal trial (as in the "Lovesick Stepmother"), we have an exotic religious ritual of reanimation. The corpse moves, he speaks! But no *j'accuse*. The corpse begs to be left in peace. The priest has to remind the deceased that he has the power to call up the furies to torture him (*tibi membra lassa torqueri*) if he does not reveal the secret of his death. So the dead man raises himself and addresses the populace, "I was poisoned by the vile arts of my newly-wedded wife and made over my still-warm bed to an adulterer." Truth from a beyond the grave—and under threat of torture, no less. What could be more impressive? But the wife (that

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1995] 82). Curiously enough, as Copres is the only monk in the *HM* to narrate a truth contest, so he is the only one to mention talking corpses (*HM* 10. 10-11, 15-16).

[31] And what is more, to sweeten his victory on the material plane, Peter receives a sack of gold as his reward for resurrecting the dead youth—just like the good doctor in the "Tale of the Wicked Stepmother."

[32] Apuleius *Golden Ass* 2. 20-30.

shrew) continues to contradict her husband. The crowd is in turmoil, some wanting to bury her alive, others unwilling to credit a corpse.

The impasse is broken by the dead man himself, promising to produce "crystal-clear documentary evidence of unsullied truth" (*intemeratae veritatis documenta perlucida*). The phrase *intemerata veritas*, we may note here in passing, implies an image of truth as an intact or virginal body. The corpse tells us that while he lay dead in that locked room, with Thelyphron guarding him, the witches began calling his name, which also happened to be Thelyphron! In fact it was the guard and not the corpse who sleepwalked towards the witches. They clipped off his nose and ears and left replacements made of wax. All eyes turn towards the Thelyphron-the-living, who, dumbfounded, pulls off his wax nose to verify the story of Thelypron-the-dead. Through the mutilated body, truth is at last revealed before the crowd.

But, we may well wonder, exactly how does the mutilation of the homonymous guard's nose prove Thelyphron's claim that he was murdered? What it really proves is the authenticity of his claim, as a resurrected body, to be a supernatural source of truth. As for the narrator, the living Thelyphron? Like a slave witness in a criminal trial, his body's mutilation attests another man's truth.

The Festival of Laughter

Immediately after Thelyphron's narrative, Lucius (somewhat the worse for drink) leaves the dinner party and returns through the dark to the home of his host Milo. He finds three burly forms assaulting the front door, assumes they are brigands, and runs them through with his sword on the spot. This sets us up for the Festival of Laughter episode in Book Three, which again involves a truth-contest in the forum, but gets its piquancy from a reversal of some of the more familiar murder-mystery patterns. This time, it is the murderer who is ignorant of his crime, while the jury that functions as an audience is in the know. The novel's readers, as meta-audience, are as ignorant as the narrator and subject besides to all the narratological torments that the author can devise.

No sooner does Lucius awaken from his drunken sleep than he begins to regret his daring deed of the night before. Sure enough, magistrates arrive to arrest him. He is led through the town like an expiatory sacrifice. There are thousands of spectators; all of them are laughing. At last we reach the forum. The magistrates take their seats on the tribunal. The public herald calls for silence. But the crowd demands the trial be transferred to the theater so more of them can get good seats.[33] Feeling like a sacrificial victim, Lucius is led to the center of the orchestra. His accuser, the prefect of the night watch, recounts finding Lucius in the act of murder, while Lucius gives his version of the truth (considerably elaborated over what he told us the first time round). Again we have the scenario of corpse, culprit, and contested truth. After rhetoric has gotten him nowhere, Lucius tries an emotional appeal, but, as in the other stories, bereaved relatives rush to the bier, and, calling out to their fellow-citizens for justice, turn up the emotional heat for the other side.

At this point the senior magistrate announces that there is only one thing left to be decided: whether the accused had any accomplices. The truth is to be extracted by torture (*tormentis veritas eruenda*). And since the slave-boy has run away, the only person left to be tortured is the foreigner, Lucius. As the torture implements are rolled out, Lucius has time to regret that he will not even die in one piece (*integer*). But here the bereaved mother intervenes to insist that the

[33]This really did happen sometimes: see the martyr-acts of Pionios 7 (Louis Robert, *Le martyre de Pionios, prête de Smyrne* Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D.C. 1994 pp. 24, 66).

bodies of the slain be uncovered before the tortures begin. Lucius is forced to lift the sheet and reveals—two inflatable goatskins, slashed to bits. "What an abrupt reversal of my fortunes!" As with a stomach-churning somersault, our perceptions of reality are reversed. Lucius is not murderer but victim. Truth, contested in public, has been revealed—under threat of torture—through the body. Only this time, it is not the body of the suspect but of his "victims."

The effect of this revelation on Lucius: paralysis and aphasia; on the knowing audience: laughter; on the unknowing audience (ourselves as readers): bewilderment. In fact, we still don't know the whole story until Milo's slave-girl confesses her part in a botched anagogic love-spell worked by her mistress: she brought the love-crazed witch blond hairs snipped from some inflated goatskins instead of from the beard of the comely young Boeotian. So when the witch performed her secret ritual, the inflated goatskins were drawn inexorably to her door—and the rest is history. Oddly enough, the slave girl even _asks to be tortured before she reveals the truth. She is Lucius' lover, full of contrition for the trouble she has caused him. She brings him a whip tucked between her breasts, in an S/M travesty of a criminal interrogation.

What we have so far is an assortment of narratives that play with common themes (truth, contests, corpses) and to some extent have a common shape: abrupt reversals in the dominant truth-paradigm that produce abrupt reversals of the fates awaiting the protagonists and force us, the reading audience, to reverse our original perceptions of what has happened hitherto. The effect is just like watching the cascading reversal of the component blocks in the old children's toy, "Jacob's Ladder." Conversion narratives and suspenseful murder-mysteries have this pattern in common: a sudden shift from belief-structure A to belief-structure B.

Two Trials in a Phrase Book

Now let us look at another representation of these themes, from a text which, unlike the *Golden Ass,* makes every effort to make the universe look predictable. The text in question is a language manual, a Greco-Latin phrase book, dating perhaps from the fourth century and originally published in 1982.[34] A language instruction manual is a short-cut to *paideia*.. As such, it is also a book of manners, intended to assure its earnest readers that *paideia* works, that *savoire-dire* entails *savoire-faire* and will, in turn, be rewarded by social flourishing. This phrase-book takes us through the routines of a typical day in the provinces, and resembles the Berlitz phrase-books of today in its implicit promise of control over fate, the right word for every contingency.[35]

The ancient student or would-be traveler is instructed how to manage a dinner party ("Do you need to vomit?...Slaves, shut the doors and windows.") He also gets a guided tour of the forum. It is reassuring to be told:

> You hear the voice of the herald summoning decurions and citizens...It is the third hour. The advocates, pleaders, and scholars enter; each clerk goes to his judge. They plead a number of [civil] cases, each according to his rhetorical training...Then the governor

[34] A. C. Dionisotti, "From Ausonius' Schooldays? A Schoolbook and its Relations." *Journal of Roman Studies* 72 (1982), 83-125.

[35]These little books are intended to reassure the traveler that foreign realities can be made to accommodate his or her expectations, "I am an American; I need an appointment for a manicure; I have left my overcoat on the train; Send for a policeman."

> approaches the tribunal to take his seat between the guards. His seat is prepared. The judges ascends the tribunal and through the voice of the herald orders all parties to stand. The criminal defendant stands up, a bandit. He is interrogated as his doings deserve. He is tortured. The torturer hits him, his chest is torn, he is hung up on the rack, he stretches, he is caned, he is flogged, he goes through the usual sequence of tortures and he still denies his guilt.[36]

Protestations of innocence do not impede the wheels of justice. They grind on without a hitch. There is no mention of advocates or witnesses. "He is sentenced to death. He is led off to the sword."

From accusation to punishment by way of interrogation. The course of events in this stylized "real-life" episode is a foregone conclusion. It matters not one bit that torture fails to elicit a confession; the defendant has already been condemned by his social and occupational status. His hardihood under torture and his temerity in denial appear only to confirm his guilt.

"Next another defendant stands up. He is innocent. He has an excellent defense (*grande patrocinium*) and eloquent men appearing on his behalf. This man's trial has a good result: he is acquitted." The witnesses who appear on his behalf are released *sine iniuria* (ατερ ιβριν), we are told. That is, they were not interrogated under torture. "This case had a good defense," the phrase book comments, "and each party present authenticated the truth of the court record (*et fidem veritatis apud acta deposuit unus quisque*)." In this trial, what is *veritas*? It is not located in the body. It is not described as "nude," resurrected from the grave, "intact," "virginal." or "torn out by torture" as it is in the other narratives we have examined. Here "truth" is not in the word-field of the body at all. It is simply authenticated by the eloquence and *bona fides* of the upper-class men who constitute the innocent defendant's *grande patrocinium.* In what, actually, does his innocence consist? In this highly stylized and summary presentation of a criminal trial, we are not presented with any evidence or required to evaluate the plausibility of competing narratives. For this defendant, his innocence *is* his *grande patrocinium*, nothing more, nothing less. With the right phrase-mongers at his side (who do not even have to open their mouths, it is enough that they be known as *viri diserti*), he sails through his trial unscathed. The phrase-book's comforting representation is that this is a pro-forma trial, a trial without a contest, without suspense. The accusing party says not a word, the accused does not have to defend himself. He has only to demonstrate his access to eloquence , to *paideia* and the social power it represents, and he is free.

On the other hand, the truth the *quaestionarius* sought to claw from the chest of the first defendant was not something to be confirmed of disconfirmed by any words from the malefactor himself. Utterly lacking in both *paideia* and *patrocinium,* he has no witness to summon, no eloquent lawyers to appear on his behalf, and his own denials count for nothing. Even in the case of the more fortunate second defendant, truth cannot be adequately contained in words. It is the social context of the speaker that authenticates what is said. For those without connections, whose social context carried no credibility in a court of law, the body could be canvassed for corroboration. But in the standard Roman criminal trial, what awaited corroboration through the flesh was not, in general, the innocence of the accused, but the preconceptions of those who

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[36] Sections 73-75. JRS 72 (1982) 104-5. Confirmation for the sort of criminal procedure here described may be found in the Palestinian Talmud and early Midrashim. See Saul Lieberman, "Roman Legal Institutions in Early Rabbinics and in the *Acta Martyrum*" *Jewish Quarterly Review* 35 (1944) 1-57, a find I owe to David Potter.

represented the authority of the state. Truth is not ultimately contained either in words or in the flesh; it is constructed by those who effectively wield power.[37]

This Foucauldian formulation will of course seem a travesty to those whose paradigm of truth is either Platonic or scientific, but I think it comes close to expressing the Roman citizen's experience. As Denise Grodzynski mused after looking at astrologists' predictions of death by *summa supplicia*, "Est-çe a dire que la justice est aussi incomprehensible que le fatum: qu'il n'y a rien a comprendre et tout a subir?"[38] The Roman criminal justice system may have presented to its subjects a face as arbitrary, as inexplicable,--even as malign--as Fortuna herself. But its very incomprehensibility comprehended a message. Arbitrariness is a effective way to dramatize power. And a common behavioral response to the unpredictable exercise of authority characterized by violent punishment is conservatism and passivity: just what an outnumbered elite ruling in the name of an invisible emperor needs.

* * *

Looking back now to the contest between Peter and Simon, we see that is a Roman power struggle transposed to a supernatural plane. Their wonder-working feats impose a discontinuity on our quotidian sense of reality by disrupting the normal laws of cause and effect in a way that patently manifests power. At issue between the two contestants is this: whose model of the unseen force behind everyday reality is more powerful--that is, more true? The Christian god had, in effect, the same problem as the emperor: how to authenticate himself long-distance as the one and the only. In a sense, the Roman emperor's authority was always fictitious, at least in the provinces that saw little of the legions. From the empire's pacified center his military victories on the periphery might seem remote. How could body-count on the Danube be rendered concrete for the burghers of Antioch or Marseilles? One couldn't stage triumphs everywhere. <But criminal trials took place in every provincial capital.> The judge upon his dias, the witness on the rack--this tableau was a potent symbol of the government's authority over truth. In the absence of mass communication, the public judicial torture of the bodies of selected deviants, slaves, and *humiliores* functioned as a way of making the illusion of all-powerful authority concrete, incarnate.

Now why should these competitive truth-demonstrations require the body? Because it is concrete, coercible, and functions so well as a symbol.[39] To a modern theorist of war and torture, it is particularly in defense of "manifestly fictitious" cultural constructs (like the all-seeing eye of an invisible emperor) that "the sheer material factualness of the human body will be borrowed to lend that cultural construct the aura of 'realness' and 'certainty.'"[40] Those who governed the Roman empire staged truth-contests daily in the forum, and practiced public torture as a kind of ritual dramatization of the state's coercive power. The effect on the victim was the simultaneous

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[37] Jim Porter points out how closely this formulation resembles that of Michel Foucault in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) 131.* The classic modern discussion of these issues is Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978. I am myself a bit mystified by the Foucauldian tone of my own remarks since I did not actually read *Discipline and Punish* before writing this paper.

[38] *Le Chatiment dans la Cité* Collection de l'école Française de Rome 79 (1984) 402.

[39] One might almost say, "too well." As Brent Shaw reminds us, although "bodies could be self-inscribed with ideologies that ran wholly contrary to those of the dominant power," bodies were finite compared to institutional forces that sought to coerce them into other meanings. "Although the body might well "never lie," the variant truths embedded in it were often as contradictory and conflict ridden as those in the world outside it" (Brent D. Shaw, "Body, Power, Identity: The Passions of the Martyrs" *Journal of Early Christianity* 4 [1996] 269-312, pp. 311-312).

[40] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain* (Oxford, 1985), p. 14.

destruction of his physical autonomy, of his sense of social connectedness, of his subjectivity altogether. And the audience?[41] Like the modern audience of the slasher film, they must have been "fascinated by the realization that all that lies between the visible, knowable outside of the body and its secret insides is one thin membrane, protected only by a collective taboo against its violation."[42] Political authority, in the state as in the slave-owning household, asserted itself through the violation of this taboo. Did Roman spectators, like those who enjoy the spectacle of celluloid violence in the modern cinema, permit themselves the briefest vicarious identification with the pain and fear of the victim?[43] I suspect that, encountered in the flesh, brutality raised to such a pitch would make empathy with the victim impossible. In a situation where imaginative identification with the victim as a fellow-human is too painful to contemplate, the viewer of a truth-contest must identify with the world-view of the torturers.[44] Thus public violence on selected bodies becomes an instrument of social coercion. More than a deterrent, it effects *a forcible realignment of subjectivity* to identify with the enforcing power.

The Role of *Paideia*

Let us think for a moment about the mentality of the judge and of the curial class from which he came, the educated elite who ruled their cities in effect as the emperor's deputies. If with Lucianic curiosity we seek to penetrate further into the mysterious cultural alchemy whereby these men perpetuated their complex notion of truth as a construct tethered now to *paideia*, now to the body, we could peak for a moment into the schoolroom. The classroom scenes in our phrase book offer a good place to start. *Si quis bene recitavit, laudatur; si quis male, coercetur.* "If the student recites well, he is praised; if he recites badly, he is punished." The word here used for punishment in school evokes the Roman magistrate's right to inflict summary punishment (*coercitio*) on people under his jurisdiction. The Greek version of the phrase-book translates *coercetur* with the graphic verb δερετε, "he is flayed." Now Roman schoolmasters had at least three weapons in their armamentarium: the cane (*ferula*), the whip (*scutia*), and the bundle of sticks (*virgae*). A proper beating with these last required that the child's back and buttocks be stretched out over the shoulders of one of his fellow-students while a third fellow held on to his feet.[45]

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[41] On the range of audience responses to the spectacle of death in the arena see Keith Hopkins, *Death and Renewal* (Cambridge, 1983) 27-30; Glenn W. Most, "*Disiecta Membra Poetae:* The rhetoric of dismemberment in Neronian Poetry" in R. Hexter and D. Selden, eds. *Innovations of Antiquity* (Routledge: New York and London, 1992) 403-6.

[42] Carol. J. Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film" in R. Howard Bloch and Frances Ferguson, eds, *Misogyny, Misandry, and Misanthropy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 187-228, p.198. Compare the remarks of Elaine Scarry, "This dissolution of the boundary between inside and outside gives rise to...an almost obscene conflation of private and public. It brings with it all the solitude of absolute privacy with none of its safety, all the self-exposure of the utterly public with none of its possibility for camaraderie or shared experience" (*The Body in Pain* [Oxford, 1985] 53).

[43] Clover (op. cit. above) speculates on the masochism as well as the sadism involved in the (male) viewing of female victims in slasher films, where "the act of horror spectatorship is itself registered as a 'feminine' experience." While perverse gender dynamics such as these may possibly have been operative in the viewing (and reading) of female martyrdoms, the spectators' fascination with "ordinary" punishments must be explained in other ways.

[44] Those who resist the interpretation of the enforcing power have two choices: to "block out" the grisly details, or mythologize them. Note Ammianus' inability to render more than an impressionistic account of the torturing of fellow-townsmen who were his social equals and with whom he was in sympathy (*Histories* 29. 1. 23-4). He is able to describe clearly the immolation of Simonides because the victim was not degraded. He was a philosopher and his death (like that of Jewish and Christian martyrs) could be assimilated it to a heroic paradigm, in his case the suicide of Peregrinus (29. 1. 37-9).

[45] S. F. Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome* (Berkeley, 1977), 143 with figure 11, a wall painting from Pompeii.

Scholars don't like to think about the extent to which physical violence was implicated in the transmission of *paideia*.[46] The definitive modern study of ancient grammarians discusses discipline as an aspect of literary culture, but not as a part of the classroom experience.[47] But antiquity's guardians of language did not spare the rod.[48] Augustine reminds us that, because of these beatings, schooling could be experienced by the young quite literally as torture, "O Lord, men the world over beseech you in terror that they may escape the rack and the claws and the various tortures of this kind; we, no less than they, feared the tortures inflicted by our masters in the schoolroom"[49]

I suspect that the corporal punishment they received in school conditioned the educated men of antiquity to take it for granted that beating is a natural consequence of being unable to perform well with words. As it was in the classroom, so it shall be in the forum: the inarticulate will be whipped. Upper class students who stayed in school long enough to progress from the *grammaticus* to the *rhetor* would have experienced a waning susceptibility to corporal punishment as they ascended the ladder of eloquence.[50] *Paideia* confers immunity to corporal punishment: this was the lesson learned by the children of the elite, learned by observation of the way things actually worked in the adult world and absorbed through the flesh, as it were, in school. Is it after all so surprising that those who ran things in the Roman empire, who had experienced authority's truth beaten into them at school, should, when they inherited positions of political authority, find it natural that the inarticulate should have the truth beaten out of them in court?

The educator Libanius illuminates the fearful symmetry of schoolroom and courtroom. He composed for his students a model exposition of the Isocratean cliché, "The root of *paideia* is bitter, but its fruits are sweet." To illustrate the first part of this hoary truth he sketches the schoolroom: "The teacher sits up on high, *like judges do.* Terrifying, knitting his brows, showing his wrath, he leads one to expect nothing peaceable."[51] The child who recites poorly can expect "recriminations, insults, blows, and threats of worse to come." But once he has become, as the result of this treatment, an educated man (*pepaideumenos*), the tables are turned.

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[46]Robert Kaster points out that the assumption of the *toga virilis* may have conferred an immunity from beatings, at least in the west. Richard Saller, in demonstrating that the adult *filius familius* was not subject to physical coercion by his *paterfamilias* gives relatively little attention to schoolboy beatings (which were not, after all, administered by fathers): "Corporal Punishment, Authority, and Obedience in the Roman Household" in Beryl Rawson, ed., *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (Oxford, 1991) 144-165.

[47] Robert A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language* (Berkeley 1988) index s.v. discipline.

[48] Quintilian 1. 3. 13-17.

[49] *Confessions* 1. 9.

[50] It is difficult to document the widely held impression that the *grammaticus* was more heavy-handed than the *rhetor.* Quintilian suggests that the *iuvenis* has less to fear than the *parvulus* (1. 3. 15). Corporal punishment was, at least in the fourth century, not entirely absent from higher education. Libanius, the teacher of rhetoric whose career is best documented, claims that his sweet temperament made his lessons so delightful that he did not need to use the lash--though he knows of other teachers "who have broken switches by the thousands" (*Or.* 2. 20, cf. *Or.* 58.1) When he did beat his students, he was careful to emphasize to their fathers that he did not use corporal punishment to correct moral faults or undisciplined behavior (because that would bring the whole business uncomfortably close to the punishment of slaves?), but only for sluggishness in their progress towards eloquence: κατὰ δὲ τῶν ὑπτίων εἰς λόγους αἱ πληγαί (*Ep.* 1330.2, cf. *Or.* 62.6). The fact that corporal punishment of rhetoric students was not routine made it risky for the teacher. Libanius fantasizes that an agreement among rival teachers not to accept each others' defecting students might have the beneficial effect of restoring the whip and the lash to the service of education (*Or.* 43. 9). In fact, at least once a student whom he had beaten decamped, taking a sizable number of his fellow students with him to another teacher (*Ep.* 554.4).

[51] *Chriae* 3. 7, Förster vol. 8 pp. 84-5: ἴδρυται μὲν ὁ διδάσκαλος ἐφ' ὑψηλοῦ τινος, ὥσπερ οἱ δικασταί...

The former subject of coercion is now a coercive force. Libanius claims the successful student has nothing to fear from his enemies. He can indict them, judge them, make them go to court and throw the book at them. And if anyone be so bold as to denounce *him* to the authorities, "he has nothing to fear: rhetorical skill suffices to ensure his safety."[52] Political leadership and the obedience of the populace are explicitly compensatory, a "crown greater than all the blows received"[53] in the course of one's education. As in many initiations that control access to a privileged group, the hazing and helplessness experienced by the candidate at the outset are proportionate to the sense of group solidarity and entitlement experienced by the fully realized member at the end.

Libanius' schoolroom vignette provides an approximately contemporary gloss on the twin trial scenes sketched by the anonymous educator who created our bilingual phrase book, where the inarticulate brigand and the *pepaideumenos* represented opposite poles of experience within the common cultural nexus of body, truth, speech, and power. But if these fourth-century texts gloss each other, what sort of a commentary can they legitimately provide on the social background of the second-century fictional narratives with which we began? They show both continuity and evolution. Although the same themes are obviously in play, there is a notable difference in the way they move. The abrupt reversals that characterized the truth-contests of those second-century narratives are nowhere to be found in the fourth-century vignettes, where truth seems static and its victory a foregone conclusion. This is more than just the difference between fictional and normative or educational texts; there has been a diachronic shift.

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The last part of this paper will sketch out some factors at play in the construction of truth that shifted between the second and the fourth century. In the second century, the social construction of religious truth was extremely wide-open. The second century inaugurated a unique period in Roman history: a deviant religious group was becoming increasingly visible to the larger society, a group making claims about truth that were simultaneously exclusivist and universalizing, a group propounding a vision of the cosmic order that did not reflect--in fact, delegitimized--the political order. In this context, be it cause or effect, the social construction of truth in general exhibits an unusual flexibility. People's belief-systems seem liable to sudden dislocations, like an unstable knee. This was an age of charismatic religious entrepreneurs and their enthusiastic (or gullible) converts: Peregrinus, Alexander, Montanus, on to Mani, Anthony, and Pachomius. Within the early Christian community itself, authority was charismatic rather than institutionalized. As we have seen, the apocryphal *Acts of Peter* portrays a world in which religious loyalty is extremely labile; both Christians and pagans shift allegiance abruptly, repeatedly.

The world of secular fiction reflects these concerns. Apuleius is well-known for playing with the instability trope on many levels,[54] but we can see signs of a similar preoccupation even in the more politically conservative Greek novels, whose protagonists, like Lucius, are young persons of good family from the curial class. They too experience sudden reversals of fortune, but ride out every crisis of mistaken identity with their own sense of who they are undisturbed.[55]

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[52] Ibid 17. Elsewhere Libanius reminds his pupils that their formal training in speech is what enables them to intimidate and physically coerce their social inferiors (Oration 35. 8)

[53] μείζων δὲ τῶν πληγῶν ὁ στέφανος (sc. ἐν τῷ πρυτανείῳ) *Chriae* 3. 13.

[54] John J. Winkler, *Auctor & Actor* (Berkeley 1985).

[55] Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self* (London and New York, 1995) 41-76.

The Greek novelists titillate by constructing scenarios in which elite youths are threatened with the loss of their social identity; yet, like their viginity, their social identity is never quite lost. These consoling bourgeois fantasies gently inoculate the reading audience against contemporary anxieties, like vaccine from a virus that has been rendered harmless in an autoclave.

There was live virus abroad, however, which undermined traditional social ties as it spread its topsy-turvy vision of the social order as an inversion of the cosmic order. At first the Roman state responded spasmodically to the Christian threat, as individual governors struggled to maintain by the usual coercive methods the decorum of their cities' corporate life.[56] But by the mid third century the immune system of the host begun to mimic some configurations of the exclusivist and universalizing belief system of the invader. For the first time participation in the state cult, by which the empire's citizens and subjects had for generations spontaneously articulated their relationship to the ruling power,[57] was made compulsory,[58] and the first universal persecution began.

In the fourth century, after Constantine brought the persecutions to an end, we see not only a disappearance of the unpredictable reversals of belief systems characteristic of the earlier period (predictable conversions of course do not count), but also an exaggeration of earlier tendencies, a hardening of attitudes. The military and fiscal innovations of the Dominate have peeled off whatever veneer of civility the urban elites may have used in earlier times to screen the brutal realities of tax-gathering.[59] The coercive violence of Roman justice becomes more visible, the punitive rhetoric of the Emperor's judicial edicts more inflamed.[60] The protection from corporal coercion by Roman magistrates once enjoyed at least in theory by all citizens has now become the jealously guarded prerogative of the *honestiores.*[61] Even the lively Lupercalia has become a rite of stylized flagellation.[62] It is thanks to an increasing frankness about the realities of power that we find texts in the fourth century that speak more precisely about the violence of long-standing cultural practices like corporal punishment. *Pepaideumenoi* under pressure articulate the principles of social dominance that once were kept well oiled and out of sight.[63]

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[56] On the early persecutions: Pliny's correspondence with Trajan shows the Roman functionary at his dutiful best (*Ep.* 10. 96-7).On the persecutor of Perpetua as a religious conservative see James Rives, "The Piety of a Persecutor," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 (1996) 1-25. The classic study of the legal basis of the persecutions is G. E. M. de Ste Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?" *Past and Present* 26 (1963) 6-38, reprinted with additional notes in M. I. Finley, ed. *Studies in Ancient Society* (London, 1974), 210-62.

[57] On this phenomenon in the Greek East see S. R. Price *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge, 1984).

[58] On this view, Decius' edict requiring universal sacrifice was not a paranoid displacement of anxiety about the barbarians abroad, but a rational move to neutralize the barbarians within.

[59] Carrie 1994, a reference I owe to Peter Brown. {waiting for ILL]

[60]See Ramsay MacMullen, "Judicial Savagery in the Roman Empire" *Chiron* 16 (1986) 147-166 (included in Ramsay MacMullen, *Changes in the Roman Empire* [Princeton 1990] 201-217).

[61] On the privileged position of the *honestiores* see Peter Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1970).

[62] A late third century sarcophagus shows an aristocratic woman's body extended in the grip of two male attendants, her buttocks exposed to the lash. See T. P. Wiseman, "The God of the Lupercal" *Journal of Roman Studies* 85 (1995) 1-22, p. 16 with refs.

[63] On this phenomenon in Libanius see my *Making Men* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 162-5. Compare the queasiness of Quintilian discussing corporal punishment in the first century, *Non morabor in parte hac, nimium est quod intelligitur* (*Institutio* 1. 3. 13-18) In fact, he has not made himself clear. What consequences of beating is he referring to in sections 16 and 17: urinary incontinence, sexual abuse?

The Contest of Synesius and John

Thus it should not surprise us that one of the most explicit statements on record linking truth, torture, and *paideia* comes from the later empire. Synesius of Cyrene, writing a public letter to a notorious fellow-citizen widely suspected of poisoning his brother, dares him to clear his name by offering his alleged hit man for judicial torture. "Torturers are terribly clever at refuting pretense, and *they have invented claws that have the force of scientific syllogisms, so that whatever is revealed when they hold power is truth itself*."[64] Here the brute force of the torturer and the educated man's techniques of logical argument are explicitly equated in terms of their power to construct truth.

In another letter Synesius gleefully recounts further dealings with the wicked John, who seems to have been a political rival.[65] It is interesting to see life falling into narrative patterns familiar from fiction. In some ways, John has played Simon to Synesius' Peter: during a time of barbarian raids he is the phony savior who arrives from out of town, makes a tremendously favorable impression of the local population, but is shown up by some form of physical test that vindicates his rival's claim to truth. "War is an excellent torture-test (βάσανος) of a man's character," Synesius remarks.[66] Preceded by all kinds of rumors, John claims to have dispersed the barbarians by the power of his name alone. He talks a good game, has military lingo down pat, and for this reason really seems to some folks "to be someone"--a phrase used in late Greek of those who successfully impose on others some claim to supernatural powers.[67] How gratifying to see that boastful windbag flee at top speed when the enemy appears in the flesh to give battle!

Synesius, the student of Hypatia who became a bishop, is commonly regarded as a transitional figure between a pagan and a Christianized aristocracy. When we look at him up close, however, the interesting thing is that in so many respects there seems to have been no transition left to be made. So homologous is his view of the divinely ordered cosmos and the Roman-ordered state that in his letter daring John to submit (vicariously) to truth-testing by torture he actually claims that the forces of divine vengeance perform the same function in the organization of the universe as public executioners perform in human government. "God is a mightier than man, and the human realm is a shadow of the divine cosmic order. The goddesses of vengeance perform the same function in the universe as public executioners, the laws' own hands, perform in states."[68] Though he veers away from threatening his deceitful opponent directly with a heavenly rack (describing instead a sort of cosmic dry-cleaner's establishment

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[64] δεινοὶ γὰρ ἐλέγξαι προσποίησινοὶ βασανισταί, καί τινες αὐτοῖς ὄνυχές εἰσιν ἐξευρημένοι, συλλογισμῶν ἐπιστημονικῶν ἔχοντες δύναμιν ὥσθ' ὅ τι ἂν ἐκείνων κρατούντων ἀναφανῇ, τοῦτ' ἔστιν αὐτὸ τάληθές. (*Letter* 44. lines 155-159 TLG), dating perhaps to 404 A.D.).

[65] *Ep.* 104.

[66] *Ep.* 104 lines 4-5 TLG. The contest between John and Synesius, whatever its "real-life" dimensions, is figured in the narrative as a test of "who is the real man." Synesius refers frequently to his rival's effeminacy and long hair (lines 11-12, 30, 34-7, 88-9 TLG).

[67] ἔδοξέ τις εἶναι (*Ep.* 104. 57 TLG). Compare the remarks of Gamaliel on a mushroom messiah: "Theudas arose, giving himself out to be somebody..." (ἀνέστη Θευδᾶς, λέγων εἶναί τινα ἑαυτόν) (*Acts* 5. 36).

[68] Ἰσχυρότερον μὲν γὰρ ἀνθρώπου θεός, τοῦ δὲ θείου παντὸς διακόσμου σκιὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον. Ἀλλ' ὅπερ εἰσὶν ἐν ταῖς πολιτείαις οἰδήμιοι, χεῖρες τῶν νόμων, τὴν αὐτὴν αἱ ποιναὶ χρείαν τῇ φύσει τοῦ κόσμου παρέχονται. (*Ep.* 44) lines 47-51 TLG) This later is usually dated to 404, after Synesius' marriage to a Christian woman but before his consecration as bishop in 410. A homily attributed to John Chrysostom develops a full-fledged comparison to the Last Judgment and a Roman law court, in which torture-machines and their operators figure prominently (Homily on Matthew 25, *PG* 56 941).

where souls are cleansed of their sins), the language Synesius employs to describe this cleansing reveals the violence of the process.
We are asked to imagine the sensations of the souls of the wicked as they are not only "ground under foot" (λακτιζόμενα) but also "clawed" or "carded" (κναπτόμενα--a technical term that belongs to the torture chamber as much as to the fuller's shop).
It is simply not possible to determine whether Synesius is speaking her as a Christian or as a Roman. By the early fifth century, at least when it comes to attitudes towards truth and coercion, the two world views had interpenetrated--or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, had evolved under mutual influence.

"Evolved" is perhaps too tame a term: Christianity was forged in the crucible of the late Roman penal system. Every martyrdom was a truth-contest in which Roman government officials sought to demonstrate state power and Christian believers, through their preternatural endurance, sought to demonstrate its futility.[69] What was the difference between a Christian martyr and the lone brigand of our phrase book who was tortured, denied his guilt, but was executed anyway? Christians, unlike brigands, were generally offered the opportunity to recant and save their skins. What brigand would prefer to be burned himself rather than offer a pinch of incense to an image of the emperor? Christians did not deny the name, but freely confessed it, thus undercutting the pretense of the authorities that they were torturing to seek truth and highlighting what of course had been true all along, that the Roman state used torture not in order to learn truth, but to teach terror. By refusing to show fear during interrogation or execution, a single Christian with his tin drum of simple-minded belief could disrupt a mighty component of state ceremonial. The solitary brigand might show great physical courage, but his refusal to confess was presumed to have been motivated by fear of dying. The torments martyrs suffered were no less painful than the "usual round of torments" visited on the brigand, but, as recapitulations of their founder's fate, they were suffused with a completely different meaning by the sufferers and supporters.[70] Had Christians' view of truth been merely propositional, many more of them would have crumbled. But Christianity's proof text was the scourged and resurrected body. Perhaps this made it possible for a Christian under torture to experience not the dissolution of identity, but the synthesis of a new identity in fusion with a supernatural patron.[71]

Thus, while Christians trumped the complex hierarchies of the *paideia* with the simplicity of the Word, they were also conditioned by the dovetailing of the penal system of the Roman State with the idiosyncratic history of their sect to see the body as a vessel of truth, as an organ of meaning. With the cessation of official persecution, the ascetic movement became heir to the idea that truth is something to be demonstrated with the body. This helps to explain not only the audience appeal of the self-inflicted torments of Christ's imitators in the desert, but also the

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[69]On these contests see David S. Potter, "Martyrdom as Spectacle" in Ruth Scodel, ed. *Theater and Society in the Classical World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992) 53-88 and Brent D. Shaw, "Body, Power, Identity: The Passions of the Martyrs" *Journal of Early Christianity* 4 (1996) 269-312.

[70] Compare the analysis of Lévi-Strauss of how a shaman succeeds in "rendering acceptable to the mind pains which the body refuses to tolerate" by recasting them as narrative elements in a mythic struggle with supernatural forces that function symbolically as "part of a coherent system on which the native conception of the universe is founded" (*Structural Anthropology* 1967, 192-3).

[71]An early martyr's dream, recorded before death in her diary, reveals her expectation that she will be endowed with supernatural male strength and that her spiritual guide will share her labors (*Acts of Perpetua and Felicitas* 10, in Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford, 1992) 116-118. Christian spectators of the martyrdom of Blandina in 177 A.D. saw her as a reinstantiation of the crucified Jesus (*The Martyrs of Lyons* 41 in Musurillo, op. cit. 74). On the authenticity of this second-century document see G. W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 85-98.

exalted meaning Christian communities attached to the intact body: to the female body that remains unpenetrated and does not change with pregnancy; to the male body that does not change with the experience of desire. Perhaps we should see in Christianity's valorization of the intact body a polemical alternative to an existentially unsettling world-view in which abrupt flip-flops of fate are precipitated by random events, rogue supernatural forces, and arbitrary intrusions of political authority-- the sort of instability that Apuleius dramatizes in the *Golden Ass* as abrupt changes of fortune and physical form. Since in a Christian universe truth is unitary and Fate cannot be allowed to have the last word, Christians, who shared with other Romans a predisposition to locate truth in the flesh, made the virginal body a symbol of perfection. This tendency to locate sacred truth in a body that does not change shows a desire to control the body's truth, to enclose its possibilities as a multivalent and mutable signifier.

The narrative instability characteristic of our second-century fictional texts, in which bodies oscillate between life and death, and in which socially acknowledged truth, under contest, continually reverses itself, may be in fact a reflection of the unsettled consensus about religious truth characteristic of the period. The *Apocryphal Acts*, Apuleius, and Lucian present us with a diverse assortment of public contests in which human bodies are whipped, mutilated, resurrected, or generally coerced into representing truth. By juxtaposing these texts with verisimilar vignettes from the fourth century we saw how, in various truth-contests, the locus of authenticity might veer uneasily from *paideia* to the body, depending on the social class of the parties concerned. These stories, fictional , hagiographic, and pedagogical, can enhance our appreciation of how intimately, in the Roman empire, the authority to authenticate truth was implicated in the social construction of power. We see in Synesius' account of his struggles with a political rival how life could continue to imitate the patterns of fiction,[72] and we learn from his fantasies about the fate of his rival on judgment day how Christians, who had once threatened to delegitimize the Roman state as a representation of the cosmic order, began under Christian emperors the task of reconstructing the Roman state and the cosmic order as mirror images of each other.

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[72] "Relationships of embeddedness, parallelism, and mutual implication organize ideological structures and lend them the flexible systematically which permits the competent participant within a particular culture to assume intelligible roles easily... Precisely because the relations involved operate below the level of the participants' full awareness, the external observer can aim at identifying not only those connections which the subjects themselves might recognize, but also the even more interesting ones they might not." Glen Most, "*Disiecta membra poetae:* The rhetoric of dismemberment in Neronian Poetry" in R. Hexter and D. Selden, eds. *Innovations of Antiquity* (Routledge: New York and London, 1992) 401.

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